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Ranking Member Terri Sewell (AL-07)
Subcommittee on Elections
Committee on House Administration
“The State of Voting Rights and Elections”
April 27, 2026, at 2:00 p.m. ET
Opening Statement, as prepared for delivery

“Good afternoon, and welcome everyone.

“Thank you all for being here today.

“I want to thank my colleague, Joe Morelle, Ranking Member of the Committee on House Administration, for joining me today, as we hold this important convening.

“As Ranking Member of the Committee’s Subcommittee on Elections, I am proud to hold today’s shadow hearing on the state of voting rights and elections in our country.

“As we begin, I want to acknowledge the moment we are in. The Department of Justice—which should be protecting the right to vote for every eligible American—is instead attacking voting rights and civil rights organizations.

“I want to say that I stand with the Southern Poverty Law Center. For decades, you have done tremendous work countering hate and extremism and fighting for civil rights, and I am proud to work with you.

“Today’s hearing kicks off what will be a series of important convenings and discussions across the country, led by the Southern Poverty Law Center, to help us in the essential fact-finding and record building needed for the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act.

“It was only 61 years ago that forefathers and foremothers of my hometown—Selma, Alabama—peacefully marched to protest a century of unrestrained voter suppression. Their courageous civil disobedience on that historic day—Bloody Sunday—kindled the consummation of our nation’s most sacred promise: ‘one person, one vote.’ Many of the marchers were horrifically beaten.

“Nothing justifies the violence they faced, but their action led to the enactment of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. And transformed our society.

“No longer could Black people be denied access to the ballot box. Gone were the days of forcing literacy tests; of guessing the number of jelly-beans in a jar. Gone were the days of paying poll taxes. Gone were the days of horrific brutality and lynchings meant to terrorize Black people away from voting. Gone were the days of political disenfranchisement and Jim Crow.

“Within a single year after the passage of the VRA, the number of registered Black voters soared across former Confederate States. In my home state of Alabama, the number of registered Black voters surged from 11 percent to 51 percent. Within four years, over 50 percent of eligible Black voters throughout the South had registered to participate in elections.

“Those finally experiencing the enfranchisement to exercise their right to vote were the grandchildren and, in some cases, even the children of enslaved Black people—people who toiled this land for generations.

“The skyrocketing number of Black voters led to a dramatic increase in Black political representation. In a single year, the total number of Black elected officials at all levels of government in former Confederate States more than doubled from 72 to 150. Within a decade, that pre-VRA number of Black elected officials in the South—where most of the enslaved descendants still lived—was 20 times higher. The number of Black elected officials nationwide increased more than tenfold.

“The elections of Barbara Jordan, Andrew Young, Shirley Chisholm, and John Lewis—people who served in this legislative body—was largely made possible because of the VRA.

“The Voting Rights Act and its later reauthorizations worked to keep away discriminatory barriers to voting, protecting US citizens of every racial background and ethnicity. It protects the rights of non-English speakers, Indigenous Americans, and people of Latino, Asian, and Pacific Islander descents. The VRA is the bedrock that guarantees our country can have elected officials that reflect the rainbow of heritages and cultures that we all come from. And make no mistake, this vast breadth of backgrounds makes our democracy more vibrant, resilient, and stronger.

“For decades, the VRA was reauthorized with overwhelming, bipartisan support. Since its initial passage, Republicans voted for the Voting Rights Act five times—most recently in 2006 under Republican President George W. Bush. Today, however, that bipartisanship for voting rights seems to have disappeared.

“Moreover, in 2013 the Supreme Court struck down some of the VRA’s most essential and crucial protections. And the pending *Louisiana v. Callais* case further threatens long-celebrated, vital safeguards. Congress must act to update the Voting Rights Act. I am proud to lead that effort as the Ranking Member of this subcommittee and as the sponsor of the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act.

“I came of age in the shadow of the Civil Rights Movement. Selma was more than my hometown. It was where ordinary Americans became Foot Soldiers in an extraordinary fight to ensure that the promise of this nation extended to all its citizens. As this year marks the 250th anniversary of this great nation, voting rights faces unignorable attacks at every level of government. Our country embodies the peculiar paradox of being a young nation but the world’s oldest democracy—mature enough to remain the shining light of democracy across the world and still adolescent enough where it is necessary to renew the promise of voting rights and full democracy for future generations of voters.

“We can and must revive the Voting Rights Act. We must pass critical, pro-democracy legislation like the Voting Rights Advancement Act, the Freedom to Vote Act, and the Native American Voting Rights Act.

“The work we undertake today, and in the months ahead, will ensure we have a VRAA that meets the needs of voters and eliminates barriers to the ballot box across the country.

“I thank you all for being here today, for the work you are doing and will do. And thank you to Ranking Member Morelle for your partnership in this endeavor.”

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